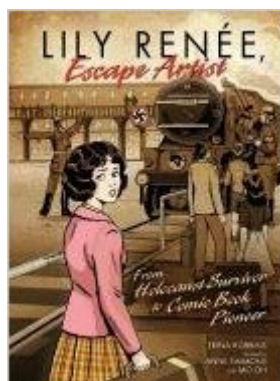


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# Lily Renee, Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor To Comic Book Pioneer



## Synopsis

In 1938, Lily Renee Wilhelm is a 14-year-old Jewish girl living in Vienna. Her days are filled with art and ballet. Then the Nazis march into Austria, and Lily's life is shattered overnight. Suddenly, her own country is no longer safe for her or her family. To survive, Lily leaves her parents behind and travels alone to England. Escaping the Nazis is only the start of Lily's journey. She must escape many more times--from servitude, hardship, and danger. Will she find a way to have her own sort of revenge on the Nazis? Follow the story of a brave girl who becomes an artist of heroes and a true pioneer in comic books.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #989,102 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #155 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Holocaust](#) #372 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Art](#) #546 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Women](#)

Age Range: 11 and up

Grade Level: 6 and up

## Customer Reviews

I'm always amazed by the survival stories that come out of occupied Europe, and Lily Renee's is no different. For such a young girl to have to leave home alone, travel to a foreign country where she barely knows the language and try to ride out the war, it's amazing adults were able to do it, let alone a girl that was barely a teenager. But she did it and it really puts the trials in one's life into perspective. Escaping from the Nazis, then from prejudiced English, traveling to America and then fighting adversity to become a pioneering name in comics kind of makes the daily grind of one's life pale in comparison. But she did it without a thought about it. It was survival mode and Lily did what she had to do to make it. The story is a simple one, told in simple language but it doesn't need to be

dressed up. The story itself is already grand. Flowery prose need not apply. Plus the illustrations to go along with it make it stand out all the more. As if you couldn't picture Lily's story in your head just from the words, the images were there to help. Rich and colorful and sometimes frightening, Robbins didn't hold the story back and Timmons and Oh were relentless with the illustrations. I couldn't have asked for anything more. Whereas something like MAUS, while amazing, is probably too graphic for a younger audience, LILY RENEE tells a realistic story without being gruesome so it makes it a little more easily digestible for a younger reader that might not be able to handle the images in like comics. It'll make them see without making them see too much and it does it without sugarcoating. I'd like to see LILY RENEE, ESCAPE ARTIST in all classrooms as a teaching tool, it's just that good. It's just one of many stories coming out of that time and I'm glad it did. It shows a fight of will and of character and I think everyone should be reading stories like this, just to see what real survival is.

It was interesting to read and kept the interest of my students. I think it's a creative way to share historical information and facts by using comic book structure. I also liked how it explained unknown factual information from the comic story at the end of the book. What a great way for students to be able to clarify unknown information and learn about it. I love the book I would read more books from this author.

I was asked the other day what kinds of nonfiction trends were appearing in books for children these days. I thought about it. I've a better sense of coincidences than trends. I mean, if there are three books out on the same subject or two biographies appearing about the same person at the same time, that I'll notice. Pulling back and looking at the genre as a whole is more difficult. Still, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that kids today are lucky. When I was a child the biographies in my school library were paltry. What we had tended to be fairly dull and about the same twenty people too. Things have changed a bit since then. You still see the same subjects featured over and over and over again (a pox on you, Thomas Edison!), but here in the 21st century some publishers aren't afraid to highlight people whose accomplishments could be labeled "unsung". The inventors of Day-Glo, for example, or a man who went to jail after refusing to shave his beard. When I heard about the character of Lily Renee, however, I was seriously excited. I mean, come on. It's right there in the subtitle. "From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer". How are you going to resist that? Telling a true tale in a graphic novel format, "Lily Renee" covers new ground, though perhaps not as compellingly as one might hope. It's a fascinating story, no question. One does wish that the format

suited the subject, though. A child in the 1930s, Lily Renee Wilhelm grew up in privilege and splendor. That is, before the Nazis invaded Austria. Jewish, Lily was lucky enough to find a spot on the Kindertransport, an agreement between Germany and England to send Jewish children out of the country. In England Lily lived for a time with her penpal, then found work as a nurse, ultimately moving to America. There she was reunited with her parents. In the course of looking for work she answered an ad for a comic book artist and, amazingly, got the job. In this way she was able to draw characters like the elegant spy Senorita Rio, who fought Nazis, in a sense, on Lily's behalf. A glossary of German to English Terms and further information is included at the back of the book. Graphic novel biographies written for children have a lot in common with picture book biographies. Limited by their format, the author has to decide right from the start how much of a life to tell. You could try to squeeze everything about them into your scant pages, which used to be the method most authors preferred back in the day. A smarter option may be to find what it is about that person's life that defined them and is why we remember them today. Then you tell their story with that moment at the core. So John Porcellino's "Thoreau at Walden" looks just at the man's Walden experiences while "Houdini: The Handcuff King" by Lutes and Bertozzi follows a single escape in the great man's life and hinges his story on that moment. Robbins has done something similar with "Lily Renee". Because her story is most fascinating when you consider its scope, we watch a lot of her youth in Vienna. The book then follows her through her teen years, following her escape from war torn Europe to America. It ends after she has acquired the comic book job that would define her career and then recaps what happened after that. Constrained by space, the book cannot delve much further into her experiences as such an artist and that is a real pity. I would have loved to know more about what it was like working as a woman in such a male dominated field. Robbins shows the initial surprise at the cusp of her hiring but nothing after that. Considering how the issue of women comic artists continues to be a hot-button issue (Marvel has been criticized recently for its plethora of XY chromosomes and reluctance to hire those of the XX persuasion) this is where I wanted the story to get into a little more detail. Instead it ends abruptly, leaving the reader frustrated. The art in this book baffled me a bit. Indeed, the text and images together had a strange stilted quality to them. The vibrancy you'd expect from such a tale appears to be lacking and I wanted to figure out why. After a time, I decided that it was possible that Robbins and Timmons were attempting to reference classic comic books with their style. This would account for a lot of the angles, images, and gestures that look old-fashioned when compared to a lot of graphic novels today. That's my theory anyway. And the backgrounds in the book are actually quite fantastic. There's a shot of Kristallnacht that drills home the horror of the event quite effectively. The fact is

that the art is quite nice, it's the coloring that's a problem. Using computers to color comics is a haphazard affair. Good coloring can be the making of a book. Bad coloring makes even the best art appear tawdry. The coloring in "Lily Renee" is passable but by no means extraordinary and drags the whole enterprise down. At the beginning we see a photograph of the real Lily embedded in the story. I would have liked more of this as the story continued. Sure, at the end there's a cluster of images of Lily (who, for the record, may have been one of the world's more beautiful women) but imagine how much more powerful the book might have been if we saw continual reminders that the story we're reading here actually happened to a real person. One thing about the book I liked without hesitation was the backmatter. In addition to the Glossary of German to English terms there are wonderful sections explaining everything from the British Internment Camps (something I've never encountered in a book for kids before) to automats. Each section begins with an illustration then recounts the subject thoroughly. There's even a part dedicated to female WWII comic book artists! Fascinating to its core. It would be difficult for anyone to seriously claim that it is easy to write a biography for children. Graphic novel biographies, in turn, are twice as hard since you not only have to have your storytelling skills up to par, you need excellent artists, inkers, letters, and color artists at your disposal too. When all those people are working at the top of their form then the end result is gold. "Lily Renee" strives to reach that goal, but due to problems in one area or another it falls a little short. A valiant attempt to highlight a true unsung hero of women's history, I appreciate this story being told. Hopefully this may inspire other people to delve into Ms. Renee's past as well.

Well-meaning. For ages 9 and up.

Here is the most wonderful historical depiction of someone before us and for us. She was such a strong figure and it is wonderful to read about her and relate to her via the illustrations provided. I would never have realized her story if it hadn't been for this illustrated representation.

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